

# Organizations must prepare for aging global workforce to stay competitive

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People's knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) change over their lifespan, and the type of work they may be attracted to and the work at which they perform well will also change. Credit: ThinkStock.com

A new book chapter from a Rice University psychologist suggests that to remain competitive, organizations must prepare for the changes in their employees' knowledge and skills over the lifespan of their workforce.

Margaret Beier, an associate professor of psychology at Rice, authored "The Aging Workforce and the Demands of Work in the 21st Century." It appears in the recently published book "Facing the Challenges of a Multi-Age Workforce: A Use-Inspired Approach" edited by Lisa

Finkelstein, Donald Truxillo, Franco Fraccaroli and Ruth Kanfer. It includes a review of previous research of individuals in the workforce and how companies are handling aging [employees](#).

The chapter's key takeaway is that people's knowledge, skills, abilities and other characteristics (KSAOs) change over their lifespan, and the type of work they may be attracted to and the work at which they perform well will also change. As a result, Beier said, the success of older employees (typically considered age 55 and above) will be determined by how well their KSAOs match the requirements of their [jobs](#). To remain globally competitive, companies and organizations must do their part to ensure the success of older employees, she said.

Beier also noted that as people age, their goals generally shift from achievement to socio-emotional; older workers may be more interested in job opportunities to mentor and lead others versus those that are related to career advancement. She said the move from manufacturing jobs (with heavy physical labor demands) to knowledge and service jobs aligns nicely with the skills and attitudes of older workers.

"One crucial step includes knowing what the ability demands of the jobs they offer are, so organizations can understand how well these jobs fit with the KSAO profile of the aging workforce and accommodate, if necessary," Beier said. "Training can also be designed such that people can proceed at their own pace, particularly online training environments. This accommodation will help older learners, when changes in cognitive abilities make learning new information challenging, and will be especially important in growth sectors such as health services, education and technical jobs that must attract more workers in the coming decades."

Beier said that [21st-century](#) employees will need continuing education throughout their careers to ensure that their jobs are still a good match.

"Employers should strive to offer development opportunities for all employees and design those opportunities so they are effective and appealing for [older workers](#)," she said.

Research for the analysis came from an extensive review and integration of research on cognitive aging and organizational psychology.

**More information:** For more information on the book, published by Psychology Press, see [www.siop.org/store/Files/275.pdf](http://www.siop.org/store/Files/275.pdf)

Provided by Rice University

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